

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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RICHARD E. DECKER
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G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

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The title of this tale may be somewhat misleading, for it does not have to do with the Alice In Wonderland or Through The Looking-Glass sort of fare, but with another menu entirely. It may be less interesting than Alice's, or less intriguing, but the results are equally astonishing.

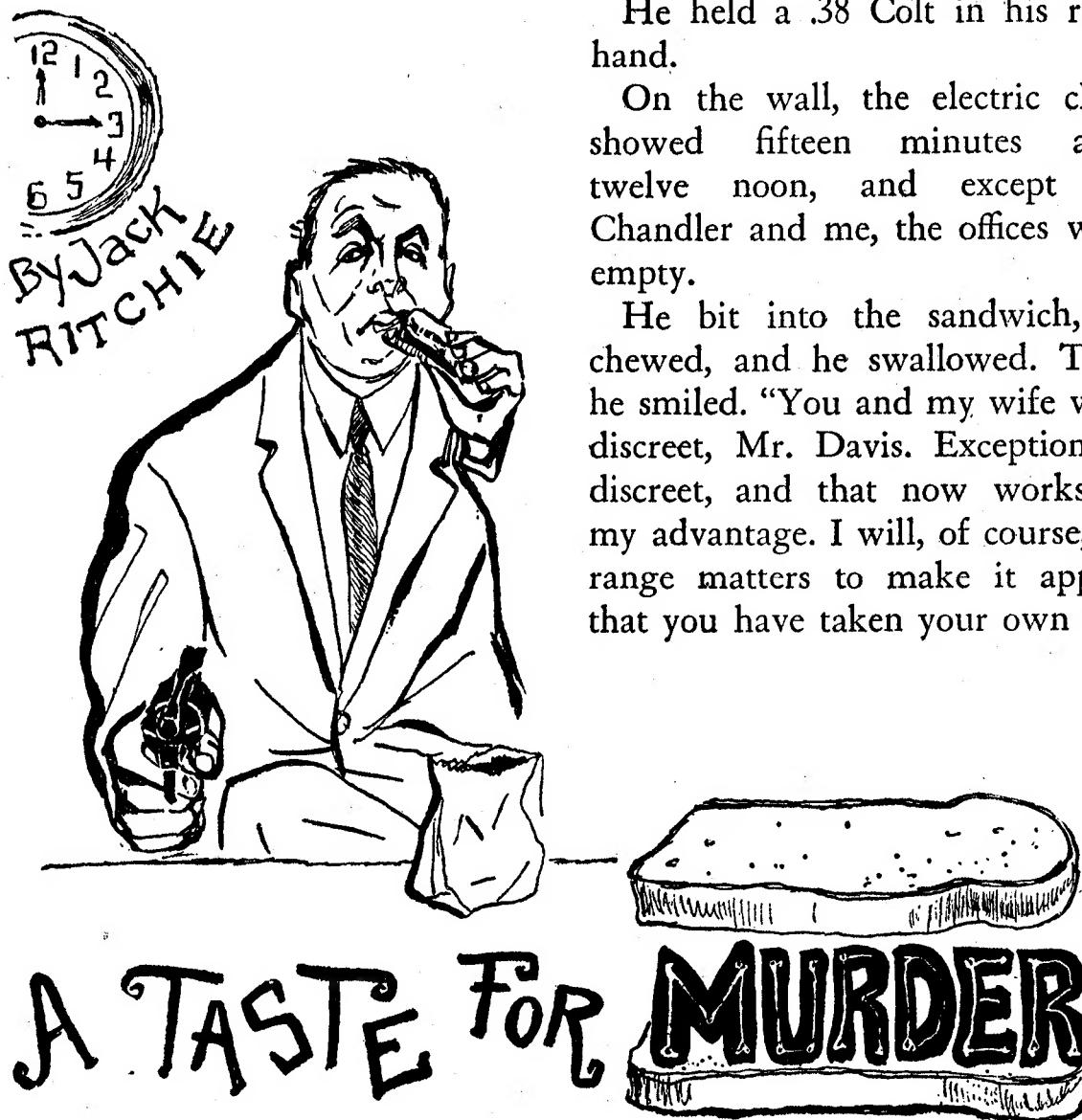
IT'S MY BELIEF that the sausage is one of the noblest inventions of mankind," Henry Chandler said. "And presented in the form of a

sandwich, it is not only nourishing, but also so practical. One can conduct the process of eating without undue preoccupation. One may read, or watch, or hold a gun."

He held a .38 Colt in his right hand.

On the wall, the electric clock showed fifteen minutes after twelve noon, and except for Chandler and me, the offices were empty.

He bit into the sandwich, he chewed, and he swallowed. Then he smiled. "You and my wife were discreet, Mr. Davis. Exceptionally discreet, and that now works to my advantage. I will, of course, arrange matters to make it appear that you have taken your own life.



But should the police not be deceived and decide a murder has been committed, they will still be at a loss for a motive. There is nothing obvious to link you and me beyond the fact that you employ me . . . and twenty others."

I placed my cold fingers on the desk top. "Your wife will know. She'll go to the police."

"Really? I doubt it. A woman may do a great deal for her lover . . . when he is alive. But once he is dead, it is another matter. Women are intensely practical, Mr. Davis. And there is the fact that she will only *suspect* that I may have murdered you. She will not *know*. And this uncertainty, if nothing else, will prevent her from going to the police. She will tell herself, quite reasonably, that there is no reason to bring her affair with you into the open. Perhaps there are dozens of people besides me who might want you dead."

Desperation was apparent in my voice. "The police will check on everyone. They'll discover that you stayed up here after the others left."

He shook his head. "I don't think so. No one knows I'm here. I left when the others did, but I returned when I knew you were alone." He chewed for a moment or two. "I decided that it would be wisest to kill you during the lunch

period, Mr. Davis. That is the time in which the police would have the most difficult time in placing anyone. People eat, they wander about, or shop, and eventually they return to their work. It is almost impossible to verify . . . or disprove . . . where they claim to have been."

He reached into the brown paper bag again. "Ordinarily I eat in any of the number of cafeterias in this neighborhood. But I am not the type who is noticed—or missed. For two weeks, Mr. Davis, I have been waiting for you to linger after the others left." He smiled. "And then this morning I noticed that you brought your lunch to the office. Did you decide that you would be too busy to go out and eat?"

I licked my lips. "Yes."

He raised the top half of the sandwich and peered at the two small sausages. "The human body reacts in peculiar ways. I understand that in moments of stress—grief, fear, anger—it often responds with hunger. And at this moment, Mr. Davis, I find myself ravenously hungry." He smiled. "Are you positive you wouldn't care for a sandwich? After all, they are yours."

I said nothing.

He wiped his lips with a paper napkin. "In his present state of

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evolution, man still requires meat. However from the point of view of one with my sensitivity, there are certain obstacles to enjoying its consumption. When I am presented with a steak, for instance, I approach it timidly. Did you know that should I bite into just one morsel of gristle, I am immediately so shattered that I cannot finish the meal?"

He studied me. "Perhaps you think that I am a bit hysterical to be discussing food at a time like this?" Then he nodded almost to himself. "I don't know why I don't shoot you this instant. Is it because I enjoy these moments and wish to prolong them? Or is it because I really dread the final act?" He shrugged. "But even if I *do* dread it, let me assure you that I have every intention of going through with this."

I took my eyes off the paper bag and reached for the pack of cigarettes on my desk. "Do you know where Helen is now?"

"Did you want to say goodbye? Or try to have her persuade me not to do this? I'm sorry I can't arrange that, Mr. Davis. Helen left on Thursday to spend a week with her sister."

I lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "I have no regrets about dying. I think I'm quite even with the world and the people in it."

He tilted his head slightly, not understanding.

"It's happened three times," I said. "Three times. Before Helen there was Beatrice, and before Beatrice there was Dorothy."

He smiled suddenly. "Are you talking to gain time? But that will do you no actual good, Mr. Davis. I have locked the outer doors to the corridor. Should anyone return before one o'clock—which I doubt—he cannot enter. And if he is persistent and knocks, I will merely shoot you and leave by the back way."

My fingertips left wet marks on the desk top. "Love and hate are close, Chandler. Especially with me. When I love—or hate—I do it intensely."

I stared at my cigarette. "I loved Dorothy and I was certain that she loved me. We would be married. I had planned upon it. I had *expected* it. But at the last moment, she told me that she didn't love me. That she never had."

Chandler smiled and bit into the sandwich.

I listened for a moment to the street traffic outside. "I couldn't have her, but no one else could either." I looked at Chandler. "I killed her."

He blinked and stared at me. "Why are you telling me this?"

"What difference does it make

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now?" I dragged on the cigarette. "I killed her, but that wasn't *enough*. Do you understand, Chandler? It wasn't *enough*. I hated her. *Hated* her."

I ground out the cigarette and spoke quietly. "I bought a knife and a hacksaw. And when I was through I weighted the bag with stones and I dropped the pieces into the river."

Chandler's face had paled.

I glared at the butt in the ashtray. "And two years later I met Beatrice. She was married, but we went out together. For six months. I thought that she loved me as I loved her. But when I asked her to divorce her husband . . . to come with me . . . she laughed. *She laughed.*"

Chandler had backed away a step.

I could feel perspiration on my face. "This time the hacksaw and the knife weren't enough. That wouldn't satisfy me." I leaned forward. "It was night when I took the bag to the animals. Moonlight. And I watched as they growled and tore and waited at the bars for more."

Chandler's eyes were wide.

I got up slowly. I touched the sandwich he had left on my desk and lifted up the top slice of bread. Then I smiled. "Pork casings come packed in salt, Chandler. Did you

know that? In a little round carton. Fifty feet of casings for eighty-eight cents."

I put the slice of bread back in place. "Did you know that a sausage stuffer costs thirty-five dollars?"

I stared past him and smiled. "First you bone the meat and then you cut it into convenient sized pieces. The lean, the fat, the gristle."

I met his eyes. "Your wife would not leave you, Chandler. She had been toying with me. I loved her and I hated her. More than I had ever hated anyone in the world. And I remembered the cats and how much they had enjoyed every . . .

I looked into Chandler's horror-filled eyes. "Where do you think Helen *really* is now?"

And then I extended the half-eaten sandwich towards him.

After the funeral, I helped Helen back to the car. When we were alone, she turned to me. "I'm positive Henry didn't know anything about us. I just can't understand why he should kill himself, and in your office."

I drove out of the cemetery gates and smiled. "I don't know. Maybe it was something he ate."

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